THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST

BY

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(1696-1787)

THE POWER OF THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST
TO ENKINDLE THE DIVINE LOVE IN EVERY HEART

FROM THE ASCETICAL WORKS OF
ST. ALPHONSUS LIGUORI
Volume II:
THE WAY OF SALVATION AND OF PERFECTION

WITH

A *SERMON ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST*

FROM THE ASCETICAL WORKS OF
ST. ALPHONSUS LIGUORI
Volume XVII: *MISCELLANY*

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Etext arranged and edited and language modernized by
Darrell Wright, 2009 from two etexts at www.archive.org

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I. What the Passion of Jesus Christ has Done for God and for Us

[331] Father Balthasar Alvarez, a great servant of God, used to say that we must not think we have made any progress in the way of God until we have come to keep Jesus crucified ever in our heart. And St. Francis de Sales said that "the love which is not the offspring of the Passion is feeble." Yes, because we cannot have a more powerful motive for loving God than the Passion of Jesus Christ, by which we know that the Eternal Father, to manifest to us his exceeding love for us, was pleased to send his only begotten Son upon earth to die for us sinners. Whence the Apostle says that God, through the excess of love with which he loved us, willed that the death of his Son should convey life to us: *For His exceeding love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, has given us life together in Christ.*1 And this was precisely the expression used by Moses and Elijah on Mount Tabor, in speaking of the Passion of Jesus Christ. They did not know how to give it any other description than an excess of love: *And they spoke of His excess, which He should consummate in Jerusalem.*2 When our Savior came into the world, the shepherds

1 "Propter nimiam charitatem suam, qua dilexit nos, cum essemus mortui peccatis, convivificavit nos in Christo." Eph. 2.4.
2 "Et dicebant excessum ejus, quem completurus erat in Jerusalem." Luke 9.31. ["excessum" also means "departure" or "death" - Ed.]

[332] heard the angels singing, *Glory to God in the highest.*1 But the humiliation of the Son of God in becoming man, through his love for man, might have seemed rather to obscure than to manifest the divine glory. But no - there was no means by which the glory of God could have been better manifested to the world than by Jesus Christ dying for the salvation of mankind, since the Passion of Jesus Christ has made us know how great is the mercy of God, in that a God was willing to die to save sinners, and to die, moreover, by a death so painful and degrading. St. John

Chrysostom says that the Passion of Jesus Christ was not an ordinary suffering, nor his death a simple death like that of other men.2

It has made us know the divine wisdom. Had our Redeemer been merely God, he could not have made satisfaction for man; for God could not make satisfaction to himself in place of man; nor could God make satisfaction by means of suffering, being impassible. On the other hand, had he been merely man, man could not have made satisfaction for the grievous injury done by him to the divine majesty. What, then, did God do? He sent his very own Son, true God with the Father, to take human flesh, so that as man he might by his death pay the debt due to the divine justice, and as God might make to it full satisfaction.

It has, moreover, made us know how great is the divine justice. St. John Chrysostom says that God reveals to us the greatness of his justice, not so much by hell in which he punishes sinners, as by the sight of Jesus on the cross; since in hell creatures are punished for the sins of their own, but on the cross we behold a God cruelly treated in order to make satisfaction for the sins of men. What obligation had Jesus Christ to die for us? *He was offered*

1 "Gloria in altissimis Deo." Luke 2.14.
2 "Non passio communis, non mors simplex, morti similis." *De Passione*, sermon 6.

[333] *because it was His own will*.1 He might have justly abandoned man to his perdition; but his love for us would not let him see us lost; and so he chose to give himself up to so painful a death in order to obtain for us salvation: *He has loved us, and delivered Himself up for us.*2 From all eternity he had loved man: *I have loved you with an everlasting love*.3 But then, seeing that his justice obliged him to condemn him, and to keep him at a distance separated from himself in hell, his mercy urged him to find out a way by which he might be able to save him. But how? By making satisfaction himself to the divine justice by his own death. And consequently he willed that there should be affixed to the cross on which he died the sentence of condemnation to eternal death which man had merited, in order that it might remain there cancelled in his blood. *Blotting out the writing of the decree that was against us, which was contrary to us, He has taken the same out of the way, fastening it to the cross*.4 And thus, through the merits of his own blood, he pardons all our sins: *Forgiving you all offences*.5 And at the same time he spoiled the devils of the rights they had acquired over us, carrying along with him in triumph as well our enemies as ourselves, who were their prey. *And despoiling the principalities and powers, He has exposed them confidently in open show, triumphing over them in Himself*.6 On which Theophylact comments, "As a conqueror in

1 "Oblatus est, quia ipse voluit." Isa. 53.7.
2 "Dilexit nos, et tradidit semetipsum pro nobis." Eph. 5.2.
3 "In charitate perpetua dilexi te." Jer. 31.3.
4 "Delens quod adversus nos erat chirographum decreti, quod erat contrarium nobis, et ipsum tulit de medio, affigens illud cruci." Col. 2.14.
5 "Donans vobis omnia delicta." Col. 2.13.
6 "Et expolians principatus et potestates, traduxit eos confidenter palam triumphans in semetipso." Col. 2.15.

[334] triumph, carrying with him the booty and the enemy."1 Hence, when satisfying the divine justice on the cross, Jesus Christ speaks only of mercy. He prays his Father to have mercy on the very Jews who had contrived his death, and on his murderers who were putting him to death: *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*.2 While He was on the cross, instead of punishing the two thieves, who had just before reviled him, *And they that were crucified with Him reviled Him*3 -- when he heard one asking for mercy, *Lord, remember me when You shall come into Your kingdom*,4 -- overflowing with mercy, he promises him Paradise that very day: *This day you shall be with me in Paradise*.5 Then, before he expired, he gave to us, in the person of John his own mother to be our mother: *He said to the disciple, Behold your mother*.6 There upon the cross he declares himself content in having done everything to obtain salvation for us, and he makes perfect the sacrifice by his death: *Afterwards Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, . . . said, 'It is finished'; and bowing His head, He gave up his spirit*.7

And behold, by the death of Jesus Christ, man is set free from sin and from the power of the devil; and, moreover, is raised to grace, and to a greater degree of grace than Adam lost: *And where sin abounded*, says St. Paul,

1 Quasi victor ac triumphator circumvehens secum praedam et hostes in triumphum.
2 "Pater, dimitte illis; non enim sciunt quid faciunt." Luke 23.34.
3 "Et qui cum eo crucifixi erant, convitiabantur ei." Mark 15.32.
4 "Domine, memento mei, cum veneris in regnum tuum." Luke 23.42.
5 "Hodie mecum eris in paradiso." Luke 23.43.
6 "Dixit discipulo: Ecce Mater tua." John 19.27.
7 "Postea, sciens Jesus quia omnia consummata sunt . . . dixit : Consummatum est. Et inclinato capite, tradidit spiritum." John 19.28.

[335] *grace did more abound*.1 It remains therefore for us, writes the Apostle, to have frequent recourse with all confidence to this throne of grace, which Jesus crucified exactly is, in order to receive from his mercy the grace of salvation, together with aid to overcome the temptations of the world and of hell. *Let its go therefore with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and*

find grace in time of need.2

Ah, my Jesus, I love You above all things, and whom would I wish to love if I love not You, who are infinite goodness, and who have died for me? Would that I could die of grief every time I think how I had driven You away from my soul by my sins, and separated myself from You, who are my only good, and who have loved me so much. *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?*3 It is sin only that can separate me from You. But I hope, in the blood You have shed for me, that You will never allow me to separate myself from Your love, and to lose Your grace, which I prize more than every other good. I give myself wholly to You. Do accept me, and draw all my affections to Yourself, so that I may love none but You.

II. What the Passion of Jesus Christ Requires of Us

Does Jesus Christ, perhaps, claim too much in wishing us to give ourselves wholly to him, after he has given to us all his blood and his life, in dying for us upon the cross? *The love of Christ impells us*.4

1 "Ubi autem abundavit delictum, superabundavit gratia." Rom. 5.20.
2 "Adeamus ergo cum fiducia ad thronum gratiae, ut misericordiam consequamur, et gratiam inveniamus in auxilio opportune." Heb. 4.16.
3 "Quis enim nos separabit a charitate Christi?" Rom. 8.35.
4 "Charitas enim Christi urget nos." 2 Cor. 5.14.

[336] Let us hear what St. Francis de Sales says upon these words: "To know that Jesus has loved us unto death, and even death on the cross, is not this to feel our hearts constrained by a violence which is the stronger in proportion to its loveliness?" And then he adds, "My Jesus gives himself all to me, and I give myself all to him. On his bosom will I live and die. Neither death nor life shall ever separate me from him."1

It was for this end, says St. Paul, that Jesus Christ died, that each of us should no longer live to the world nor to himself, but to Him alone who has given himself wholly to us. *And Christ died for all, that they who live may not now live for themselves, but for Him who died for them*.2 He who lives for the world seeks to please the world; he who lives for himself seeks to please himself; but he who lives for Jesus Christ seeks only to please Jesus Christ, and fears only to displease him. His only joy is to see him loved; his only sorrow, to see him despised. This is to live for Jesus Christ; and this is what he claims from each one of us. I repeat, does he claim too much from us, after having given us his blood and his life?

Why, then, O my God! do we employ our affections in loving creatures, relatives,

friends, the great ones of the world, who have never suffered for us scourges, thorns, or nails, nor shed one drop of blood for us; and not in loving a God, who for love of us came down from heaven and was made man, and has shed all his blood for us in the midst of torments, and finally died of grief upon a cross, in order to win to himself our hearts! Moreover, in order to unite himself more closely to us, he has left himself, after his death, upon our altars, where he makes himself one with us, that we

1 *Love of God*, Bk. 7, ch. 8.
2 "Pro omnibus mortuus est Christus, ut et qui vivunt, jam non sibi vivant, sed ei qui pro ipsis mortuus est." 2 Cor. 5.15.

[337] might understand how burning is the love with which he loves us? "He has mingled himself with us," exclaims St. John Chrysostom, "that we may be one and the same thing; for this is the desire of those who ardently love."1 And St. Francis de Sales, speaking of Holy Communion, adds: "There is no action in which we can think of our Savior as more tender or more loving than this, in which he, as it were, annihilates himself, and reduces himself to food, in order to unite himself to the hearts of his faithful."

But how is it, O Lord! that I, after having been loved by You to such an excess, have had the heart to despise You? According to Your just reproach, *I have nourished and brought up children, and they have despised me*.2 I have dared to turn my back upon You, in order to gratify my senses. *You have cast me behind Your back*.3 I have dared to drive You from my soul, *The wicked have said to God, Depart from us*.4 I have dared to afflict that heart of Yours which has loved me so much. And what, then, am I now to do? Ought I to be distrustful of Your mercy? I curse the days in which I have dishonored You. Oh, if only I had died a thousand times, O my Savior, rather than that I had ever offended You! O Lamb of God! You have bled to death upon the cross to wash away our sins in Your blood. O sinners! what would you not pay on the day of judgment for one drop of the blood of this Lamb? O my Jesus! have pity on me, and pardon me; but You know my weakness; take, then, my will, that it may never more rebel against You. Expel from me all love that is not for You. I choose You alone for my treasure

1 "Semetipsum nobis immiscuit, ut unum quid simus; ardenter enim amantium hoc est." *Ad pop. Ant. hom.* 61.
2 "Filios enutrivi et exaltavi; ipsi autem spreverunt me." Is. 1.2.
3 "Projecisti me post corpus tuum." Ezek. 23.35.
4 "Qui dixerunt Deo: Recede a nobis." Job 21.14.

[338] and my only good. You are sufficient for me; and I desire no other good apart

from You. *The God of my heart, and God is my portion forever*.1

O little sheep, beloved of God (so used St. Teresa to call the Blessed Virgin), who are the Mother of the divine Lamb, recommend me to your Son. You, after Jesus, are my hope; for you are the hope of sinners. To your hands I entrust my eternal salvation. *Spes nostra, salve.*

III. A Sweet Consideration for Souls that Love God, at the Sight of Jesus Crucified

1. SUFFERINGS OF JESUS ON THE CROSS

Jesus on the cross! O stupendous sight for heaven and earth of mercy and of love! To see the Son of God dying through pain upon a cross of infamy, condemned as a malefactor to so bitter and shameful a death, in order to save sinful men from the penalty that was due to them! This sight has ever been, and will always be, the subject of the contemplation of the saints, and has led them willingly to renounce all the goods of the earth, and to embrace with great courage sufferings and death, that they might make themselves more pleasing to a God who died for love of them. The sight of Jesus despised between two thieves has made them love contempt far more than worldlings have loved the honors of the world. Beholding Jesus covered with wounds upon the cross, they hold in abhorrence the pleasures of sense, and have endeavored to afflict their flesh in order to unite their sufferings to the sufferings of the Crucified. Beholding the patience of our Savior in his death, they have joyfully accepted the most painful sicknesses, and even the most cruel torments that tyrants

1 "Deus cordis mei, et pars mea Deus in aeternum." Ps. 72.26.

[339] can inflict. Lastly, from beholding the love of Jesus Christ in being willing to sacrifice his life for us in a sea of sorrows, they have sought to sacrifice to him all that they had, possessions, children, and even life itself.

St. Paul, in speaking of the love which the Eternal Father has borne towards us, in that, when he saw us dead by reason of sin, he willed to restore life to us by sending his Son to die for us, calls it too great a love. *But God, who is rich in mercy for his exceeding love with which He loved us, has given us life together in Christ*.1 And in the same way ought we to call the love with which Jesus Christ has willed to die for us too great a love. Hence the same apostle says, *We preach Jesus Christ crucified, unto the Jews indeed a stumbling-block, and to the Gentiles,*

foolishness.2 St. Paul says that the death of Jesus Christ appeared to the Jews a stumbling-block, because they thought that he should have appeared on earth full of worldly majesty, and not indeed as one condemned to die like a criminal upon a cross. On the other hand, to the Gentiles it seemed a folly that a God should be willing to die, and by such a death too, for his creatures. On this subject St. Laurence Justinian remarks: "We have seen Him who is wise infatuated through an excess of love."3 We have beheld Him who is the eternal wisdom itself, the Son of God, become a fool for us, by reason of the too great love which he bore towards us. And does it not seem a folly for a God, almighty and supremely happy in himself, to be willing of his own

1 "Deus autem, qui dives est in misericordia, propter nimiam charitatem suam qua dilexit nos, et cum essemus mortui peccatis, convivificavit nos in Christo." Eph. 2.4.
2 "Praedicamus Christum crucifixum, Judaeis quidem scandalum, Gentibus autem stultitiam." 1 Cor. 1.23.
3 "Vidimus sapientiam amoris nimietate infatuatam." *Serm. de Nat. Dom.*

[340] accord to subject himself to be scourged, treated as a mock king, struck, spit upon in the face, condemned to die as a malefactor, abandoned by all upon a cross of shame, and this to save the miserable worms he himself had created? The loving St. Francis, when he thought of this, went about the country exclaiming with tears, "Love is not loved! Love is not loved!" And hence St. Bonaventure says that he who wishes to keep his love for Jesus Christ ought always to represent him to himself hanging on the cross and dying there for us. "Let him ever have before the eyes of his heart Christ dying upon the cross."1

Oh, happy is that soul which frequently sets before its eyes Jesus dying on the cross, and stops to contemplate with tenderness the pains which Jesus has suffered, and the love with which he offered himself to the Father, while he lay agonizing on that bed of sorrow. Souls that love God, when they find themselves more than usually harassed by temptations of the devil and by fears about their eternal salvation, derive great comfort by considering in silence and alone Jesus hanging on the cross, and shedding blood from all his wounds. At the sight of the crucifix, all desires for the goods of this world flee utterly away. From that cross exhales a heavenly breath, which causes us to forget all earthly objects, and enkindles within us a holy desire of quitting all things, in order to employ all our affections in loving that Lord who has pleased to die through love for us.

Isaiah foretold that our Redeemer would be a man of sorrows. *And we have seen him . . . despised, and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows*.2 Now let him who wishes to behold this man of sorrows, foretold by Isaiah, look on Jesus Christ dying on the cross. There, nailed by his

1 *De perf. vit.* ch. 6.
2 "Vidimus eum . . . despectum, et novissimum virorum, virum dolorum." Isa. 53.2.

[341] hands and feet, he hangs, the whole weight of his body pressing on his wounds in all his members, which are every one of them torn and bruised. He suffers continual and excruciating pains; whichever way he turns, so far from finding relief, his pain but increases more and more, until it deprives him of life; and thus this man of sorrows is condemned by the Father to die of sheer sufferings on account of our sins.

What Christian, then, O my Jesus! knowing by faith that You have died upon the cross for love of him, can live without loving You! Pardon me, then, O Lord! first of all, this great sin of having lived so many years in the world without loving You. My beloved Savior, the thought of death fills me with dread, as being the moment when I shall give an account to You of all the sins that I have committed against You; but that blood that I see flowing from Your wounds causes me to hope for pardon from You, and at the same time the grace of loving You for the future with my whole heart, by virtue of those merits You have earned by so many pains. I give myself wholly to You; I will no longer be my own; I desire to do all; I desire to suffer in order to please You. I will die for You who have died for me: I will say to You, with St. Francis, "May I die for love of the love of You, who did vouchsafe to die for love of the love of me."1

2. DEATH OF JESUS

Father, into Your hands I commend my spirit.2 These words, uttered by Jesus Christ upon the cross when he was on the point of death, bring great comfort to the

1 Moriar amore amoris tui, qui amore amoris mei dignatus es mori.
2 "Pater, in manus tuas commendo spiritum meum." Luke 23.46.

[342] dying, who find themselves engaged in that last combat with hell, and are about to pass into eternity.

My beloved Jesus, I will not wait for the moment of my death to recommend my soul to You. From this moment I recommend it to You. By that blood shed for me, permit it not to be separated from You. Henceforth I will be Yours, and all Yours without reserve. If You see that I should ever turn my back upon You, as I have in times past, I beseech You, let me die in this moment in which I hope to be in Your grace.

In You, O Lord, have I hoped; I shall not be confounded forever.1 O faithful soul! lift up thine eyes, and look at the cross of your Redeemer, now dead for the love of you. Say to him: O my Jesus! in Your flesh lacerated and torn by the scourges, the thorns, the nails, I behold the burning love You have borne me, and the ingratitude I have shown You; but Your blood is my hope. Wretch that I am, how often have I renounced Your grace, and have myself willed to condemn myself to hell. What would become of me if You had not chosen to die for me? I could die of grief every time I think of having despised Your infinite goodness, and of having of my own accord banished and separated You from my soul. But no; henceforth, with the help of Your grace, I will leave all. Enough for me to be united with You, my God and my all!

O men, O men! how can you show such contempt for a God who has suffered so much for you? Behold him on that cross, how he sacrifices himself by death to pay for your sins, and to gain your affections. My Jesus, I will live no longer ungrateful for such goodness. O wounds of Jesus, wound me with love! O blood of

1 "In te, Domine, speravi; non confundar in aeternum." Ps. 30.2.

[343] Jesus, inebriate me with love! O death of Jesus, make me die to every affection which is not for Jesus! I love You more than myself, O my Jesus! and there is no pain that causes me more sorrow than the thought of having so often despised Your love. Accept me; in Your mercy reject me not, now that I give myself to You without reserve.

Behold, lastly, how our Savior, overwhelmed with sufferings upon the cross, bows his head, and breathes forth his soul: *And bowing His head, He gave up his spirit*.1 Eternal God, I, a wretched sinner, have dishonored You by my evil life; but Jesus Christ, in making satisfaction for me by his death, has abundantly restored Your honor. By the merits of Your Son, who have died for me, have pity on me.

O Jesus, my Savior! I see You now dead on this cross. You speak no more; You breath no more; because You have life no longer, having willed to lose it to give life to our souls. You have no longer any blood; for You have shed it all, by dint of torments, to wash away our sins. In one word, You have abandoned Yourself to death through Your love for us. *He has loved us, and delivered Himself for us*.2 "Let us consider," writes St. Francis de Sales, "this divine Savior stretched upon the cross, as upon his altar of honor, where he is dying of love for us; but a love more painful than that very death. Ah, why, then, do we not in spirit throw ourselves upon him to die upon the cross with him, who has willed to die there for love of us?

I will hold him, we ought to say, and will never let him go. I will die with him, and be burned up in the flames of his love. One and the same fire shall consume this divine Creator and his miserable creature. My Jesus is all mine, and I am all his. I will live and die upon his

1 "Et inclinato capite, tradidit spiritum." John 19.30.
2 "Dilexit nos, et tradidit semetipsum pro nobis." Eph. 5.2.

[344] breast; neither death nor life shall ever separate him from me."1

Yes, my sweet Redeemer, I embrace with tenderness Your pierced feet; and, filled with confidence in behold ing You dead for love of me, I repent of having despised You, and I love You with my whole soul. At the foot of Your cross I leave You my heart and my will. Do You Yourself nail it to this cross, so that it may never be separated from You, and henceforth may have no other desire than to please You alone.

3. FRUITS OF THE DEATH OF JESUS

St. John writes that our Savior, in order to make his disciples understand the death he was to suffer upon the cross, said, *And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to Myself. Now this he said, signifying what death he should die*.2

And, in fact, by exhibiting himself crucified and dead, how many souls has Jesus drawn to himself, so that they have left all to give themselves up entirely to his divine love. Ah, my Jesus! draw my soul to Yourself, which was one time lost; draw it by the chains of Your love, so that it may forget the world to think of nothing else but of loving and pleasing You. *Draw me after You by the odor of Your ointments*.3

My Lord, You know my weakness and the offences that I have committed against You. Draw me out of the mire of my passions; draw all my affections to Yourself, so that I may attend to nothing but Your pleasure only, O my God, most lovely! Hear me, O Lord! by the merits of Your death, and make me wholly Yours.

1 *Love of God*, Bk. 7. ch. 8.
2 "Et ego si exaltatus fuero a terra, omnia traham ad meipsum." John 12.32.
3 "Trahe me post te in odorem unguentorum tuorum." (Cf. Song 1.3)

[345] St. Leo tells us that he who looks with confidence upon Jesus dead upon the cross is healed of the wounds caused by his sins. "They who with faith behold the death of Christ are healed from the wounds of sin."1 Every Christian, therefore,

should keep Jesus crucified always before his eyes, and say with St. Paul, *I judged not myself to know anything among you, but Jesus Christ, and Him crucified*.2 In short, the Apostle says, that he did not desire any other knowledge in this world than that of knowing how to love Jesus Christ crucified. My beloved Savior, to obtain for me a good death You have chosen a death so full of pain and desolation! I cast myself into the arms of Your mercy. I see that many years ago I ought to have been in hell, separated from You forever, for having at one time despised Your grace; but You have called me to penance, and I hope have pardoned me; but if through my fault You have not yet pardoned me, pardon me at this moment. I repent, O my Jesus! with my heart, for having turned my back upon You, and driven You from my soul. Restore me to Your grace. But that is not enough: give me strength to love You with all my soul during my whole life. And when I come to the hour of my death, let me expire burning with love for You, and saying, my Jesus, I love You, I love You, and thus continue to love You for all eternity. From this moment I unite my death to Your holy death, through which I hope for my salvation. *In You, O Lord, have I hoped; I shall not be confounded forever*.3 O great mother of God, you after Jesus are my hope. In you, O Lady, have I hoped;

1 "Qui intuentur fide mortem Christi, sanantur a morsibus peccatorum." *In Jo. tr.* 12.
2 "Non enim judicavi me scire aliquid inter vos, nisi Jesum Christum, et hunc crucifixum." 1 Cor. 2.2.
3 "In te, Domine, speravi; non confundar in aeternum." Ps. 30.2.

[346] I shall not be confounded forever. O devout souls, when the devil wishes to make us distrustful about our salvation by the remembrance of our past sins, let us lift up our eyes to Jesus dead upon the cross, in order to deliver us from eternal death. After a God has made us know by means of the holy faith the desires he has of our salvation, having even sacrificed his life for us, if we are resolved really to love him for the remainder of our lives, cost what it may, we should be on our guard against any weakness of confidence in his mercy. After he has given us so many signs of his love for us, and of his desire for our salvation, it is a kind of sin against him not to put our whole confidence and hope in his goodness.

Full, then, of holy confidence, let us hope for every good from the hands of a God so liberal and so loving; and at the same time let us give ourselves to him without reserve, and thus pray to him: O eternal God, we are sinners, but You who are Almighty can make us saints; grant that henceforth we may neglect nothing that we know to be for Your glory, and may do all to please You. Blessed shall we be if we lose all to gain You, the infinite good. Grant that we may spend the remainder of our lives in pleasing You alone. Punish us as You will for our past sins, but deliver us from the chastisement of not being able to love You; deprive us of all things save Yourself. You have loved us without reserve; we also will love You without reserve,

O infinite Love, O infinite Good. O Virgin Mary, draw us wholly to God; you can do so; do so for the love that you have for Jesus Christ.

4. CONCLUSION

Let us finish this little treatise with the prayer of St. Francis de Sales, saying: "O Eternal Love, my soul seeks You and chooses You for all eternity. Come, O [347] Holy Spirit! and kindle in our hearts the fire of Your love. To die and to love; to die to everything, in order to live eternally for the love of Jesus. O Savior of our souls, grant that we may sing forever and ever, Live, Jesus! I love Jesus. Live, Jesus, whom I love! I love Jesus, who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen!"1

1 *Love of God*, Bk. 12, ch. 13.

PART II
SERMON ON THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST

1. First scene: The Garden of Olives
2. Second scene: The Pretorium
3. Third scene: Calvary

ALAS, what melancholy signs strike me in this temple! I see the dark appearance, I notice the despoiled altars; I hear the melancholy chant! Ah! I understand: these are signs of the grief that the Church feels, lamenting the death of Jesus her Spouse. It is therefore just that on this day we unite our tears to those of the Church, who is our Mother, and that we devote ourselves to the consideration of the death of our God, who after a life of pain wished to die for us on an infamous gibbet, in an abyss of shame and suffering.

Come, O holy cross! come and show thyself to this people; you are the fortunate Ark in which one can find salvation in the midst of the shipwreck of this world; you are the wonderful Rod that gives to men the strength to be able to become from monsters of iniquity flourishing rods of holy virtues; you are the brazen Serpent at the sight of which sinners, poisoned by sin, may recover health; you are the predestined and resplendent Tree chosen among thousands to sus- tain the members of the Redeemer; and you are, finally, the sorrowful Altar on which the Savior of the world wished to be immolated for our salvation. Give me the strength and all the help that I need to represent to these faithful souls the outrages, the sufferings, and the anguish which Jesus Christ endured when upon you he left this world.

The whole life of Jesus Christ was full of sufferings and disgraces; but there are especially three sad scenes of his pains in which he gave us the greatest marks of [299] his love for us: the first is the GARDEN OF OLIVES; the second, the PRETORIUM; the third, CALVARY.

The first of these scenes in which the Passion of our Redeemer began was hidden from the eyes of men, but not from the eyes of God and of the angels.

First Scene: The Garden of Olives

Having on Thursday evening washed the feet of his disciples after giving himself to us in the sacrament of the altar as a pledge of his tender love for us, our amiable Savior arrived at the garden about midnight, and prostrating himself on the ground, he began to pray. Then he was assailed by great fear, great repugnance, and great sadness.

He began then to feel great fear of the death and of the pains which he was to suffer: *He began to fear*.1 But how? did he not offer himself voluntarily to undergo these torments? *He was offered because it was His own will*.2 Did he not ardently desire this time of his Passion according to what he had said to his disciples a little while before: *With desire I have desired to eat this Pasch with you before I suffer*.3 How, after this, was he seized with so great a fear of death that he went so far as to ask his Father to be delivered from it: *My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me*.4 Ah! certainly our good Lord wished to die for us, and thus to show us the love that he bore us; but in order that the men might understand what cruel anguish and what deluge of evils he was going to undergo in his Passion, he allowed so horrible a fear to come over him: He began to fear.

1 "Coepit pavere." Mark 14.33.
2 "Oblatus est, quia ipse voluit." Is. 53.7.
3 "Desiderio desideravi hoc pascha manducare vobiscum, antequam patiar." Luke 22.15.
4 "Pater mi, si possibile est, transeat a me calix iste." Matt. 27.39.

[300] And to be heavy : He also began to feel great repugnance at the sight of the pains that had been prepared for him. When one feels repugnance, even delightful things become painful. Hence with such a repugnance what punishment for the heart of Jesus, what horrible sight then presented itself to his mind of all the interior and exterior torments which were to deprive him of life by afflicting so cruelly his body and his blessed soul! He distinctly saw all the sufferings that awaited him, the mockeries, the outrages, the injuries, the blows, the thorns, the cross, and above all that shameful and desolate death which he was to suffer on an infamous cross,

abandoned by every one, by men and by God, in an abyss of sorrows and disgrace. This is what caused him so bitter a repugnance that he was obliged to ask his eternal Father for strength: He began to fear and to be heavy.

With this fear and repugnance Jesus felt at the same time great sadness and great affliction of mind: *he began to grow sorrowful and to be sad*.1 But, O Lord! is it not You that have given to Your martyrs such a force in sufferings that they went so far as to despise torments and death and to submit to them with joy? How then does it happen that for Yourself, O Jesus! You have reserved Yourself to suffer by dying in so great sadness? Ah! I know the reason ; for at this moment there were presented to his mind all the sins of the world, the blasphemies, the sacrileges, the impurities, and all the other sins that men were going to commit after his death. Each one of these sins came then as a cruel monster to tear his heart by its own malice. It seems that then in his agony our afflicted Savior was obliged to say: O men! is it thus that you respond to the immense love that I have borne towards you? Alas! after so many sufferings endured for you, to see so many sins! After so many

1 "Coepit contristari et moestus esse." Matt. 26.37.

[301] proofs of my love, to see so much ingratitude! It is that which afflicts me, makes me sad even unto death, and makes me sweat blood: *And his sweat became as drops of blood trickling down upon the ground*.1

O my tender Jesus! I do not notice in this garden scourges, thorns, nails, which wound You; yet I see You bathed in blood from head to foot. My sins there fore were the cruel pressure which, by the violence of the affliction and of sadness, forced so much blood from Your heart. I have myself been one of Your most cruel executioners.

But should we stop here in conversing with Jesus when he is already hurrying to meet his Passion which he so much desires? In fact, there is Judas, who is accompanied by a troop of Jews and soldiers, and who is coming to seize Jesus in the garden. Jesus sees him coming, and what does he do? Yet bathed in blood, with his heart all inflamed with love of us, he rises, and says to the three disciples who were with him: *Rise up, let us go. Behold, he that will betray me is at hand*.2 Come let us meet the enemies who are coming to arrest me.

When Jesus was in their presence, Judas advanced, extended his arms and gave him a kiss. This kiss was the sign of treason: on this account Jesus addressed this word of reproach to the traitor: *Judas, betrayest you the Son of man with a kiss?*3 O Judas! is it by a kiss that you betrayest the Son of man? He afterwards asked the

Jews whom they were seeking: *Whom do you seek?*4 They answered: Jesus of Nazareth. After this they brutally seized him, and bound him like a criminal:

1 "Et factus est sudor ejus, sicut guttae sanguinis decurrentis in terram." Luke 22.44.
2 "Surgite, eamus: ecce, qui me tradet, prope est." Mark 14.42.
3 "Juda, osculo Filium hominis tradis?" Luke 24.48.
4 "Quem quaeritis?" John 18.4.

[302] *They took Jesus and bound him*.1 Alas! a God bound like a criminal! "O King of kings!" cries out St. Bernard, weeping, "what have You to do with chains?"2 Chains are for malefactors, and not for You who are innocent, the Saint of saints. "Look, O man!" says St. Bonaventure, "at these dogs dragging him along."3

Jesus then bound, in the midst of this vile soldiery, is pushed out of the garden, and led to Jerusalem before the Prince of priests. And where are his disciples? do not at least they accompany their Master in order to defend him? No, all left him: *Then his disciples, leaving him, all fled away*.4

He then enters Jerusalem during the night. At the noise that so many people make in their march, those that are in the houses awaken and, approaching the windows, ask what prisoner they are leading away. They answer that it is Jesus of Nazareth, who has been found out to be an impostor, a seducer.

He is presented to Caiphas, who was expecting him; this proud high-priest is sitting, and Jesus is standing before him, having his hands tied like a criminal, hold ing his eyes cast down, all humility and meekness. The high-priest interrogates him on the doctrine that he taught; Jesus answered that he had spoken publicly before every one, and that the witnesses present who had heard him knew what he had said: *I have spoken to the world; . . . Behold, they know what things I have said.*5 After an answer so just and so moderate, an executioner advances and gives him a severe blow on the cheek,

1 "Comprehenderunt Jesum, et ligaverunt eum." John 18.12.
2 "O Rex regum! quid tibi et vinculis?" *De Passione,* ch. 4.
3 "Intuere, homo, canes istos trahentes eum." *De vita Christi,* ch. 75.
4 "Tunc discipuli ejus relinquentes eum, omnes fugerunt." Mark 14.50.
5 Ego palam locutus sum mundo; . . . ecce hi sciunt quae dixerim ego." John 18.20.

[303] saying in his fury: *Do you answer the high-priest thus?*1 How could an answer so humble merit so gross an insult in the presence of this assembly? The high-priest, however, instead of rebuking his insolent servant, remains silent, and by his silence approves of his conduct. But then Jesus said to the servant: *If I have spoken evil, give testimony of the evil; but if well, why do you strik me?*2

Then Caiphas commanded Jesus in the name of God to say whether he was the Son of God: *I adjure You, by the living God, that you tell us if You be the Christ the Son of God*.3 Our Lord then, asked in the name of God, confessed the truth, saying: *I am*;4 and one day you shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of the Father, and coming on the clouds of heaven to judge the world. At these words, Caiphas, instead of falling prostrate on his face to adore the Son of God, rends his garments and exclaims: *He has blasphemed!*5 Then addressing the other priests, he asked their counsel and said: Now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think? And all answered: *He is guilty of death*.6 Yes, my Jesus, You deserve death, since You have wished to make satisfaction for the sins of men.

Then the executioners seized him, and treating him as a man already condemned to death, they began to spit in his face and to strike him: *Then did they spit in his face, and others struck his face with the palms of their hands*.7 Then having bandaged his eyes, and mocking him as

1 "Sic respondes Pontifici?" Ibid. 22.
2 "Si male locutus sum, testimonium perhibe de malo; si autem bene quid me caedis?" Ibid. 23.
3 Adjuro te per Deum vivum, ut dicas nobis, si tu es Christus Filius Dei." Matt. 26.63.
4 "Ego sum." . . . . 5 "Blasphemavit!". . . . 6 "Reus est mortis!"
7 Tunc exspuerunt in faciem ejus, et colaphis eum ceciderunt; alii autem
palmas in faciem ejus dederunt." Matt. 26.67.

[304] a false prophet, they said: *Prophesy unto us, O Christ, who is he that struck You*.1

When the morning was come, they conducted Jesus to Pilate in order to have him condemned to death. Pilate, finding no reason to condemn him, declared him innocent: *I find no fault in him*.2 However, as the Jews insisted, he sent him to Herod to be judged by him. Herod was delighted to see Jesus in his court, because he hoped that our Lord would perform some miracles about which he had heard others speak. He then proposed many questions to him, but Jesus remained silent. Then this proud tyrant ordered him to be clothed with a white garment as if he were a fool, and he sent him back to Pilate after having exposed him to the mockery and contempt of his entire court: *And Herod with his army, set Him at nought; and mocked Him, putting on Him a white garment, and sent Him back to Pilate*.3 O Son of God! O Eternal Wisdom! You wouldst submit even to the ignominy of being treated as a fool!

Pilate, in order to avoid condemning an innocent man, seeing that he was not successful in sending Jesus to Herod, devised another means. As the people had a

right of asking the Roman governor for the liberation of a prisoner at the Paschal solemnity, Pilate proposed to them to choose between Jesus Christ and Barabbas, who was a wicked man, a murderer; but the people, instigated by the hatred of the priests, who wished the death of Jesus Christ, began to cry out that they preferred Barabbas: *Not this man, but Barabbas*.4 This is what he does that commits a mortal sin: it is then

1 "Prophetiza nobis, Christe, quis est, quite percussit." Matt. 26.68.
2 "Ego nullam invenio in eo causam." Luke 23.4.
3 "Sprevit autem illum Herodes cum exercitu suo, et illusit indutum veste alba; et remisit ad Pilatum." Luke 23.11.
4 "Non hunc, sed Barabbam." Jn 18.40

[305] proposed to him to choose between Jesus Christ and the sin that he wishes to commit, as the sin of revenge, of a certain pleasure, etc.: when he gives his consent, it is as if he said: Not this man, but Barabbas; I prefer Barabbas to Jesus Christ.

After having proposed Jesus Christ and Barabbas to the choice of the people, and seeing that this means was unsuccessful, Pilate thought of having him scourged and then set at liberty: *I will chastise Him, therefore, and release Him*.1 Here we are then at the second scene of the sufferings of Jesus Christ: *Then, therefore, Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him*.2 O how much less would he have suffered if Pilate had had less compassion for him, and if he had without delay condemned him to the death of the cross! All this served but to increase the sufferings and humiliations of our Savior.

Second Scene: The Pretorium

Having arrived at the pretorium, our loving Jesus, obedient to the executioners, strips himself of his garments, embraces the column, and then lays on it his hands to have them bound. My God, already is begun the cruel torture! O angels of heaven! come and look on this sorrowful spectacle, and if it be not permitted you to deliver your king from this barbarous slaughter which men have prepared for him, at least come and weep for compassion. And you, Christian souls, imagine yourselves to be present at this horrible tearing of the flesh of your beloved Redeemer; look on him how he stands, your afflicted Jesus with his head bowed, looking on the ground, blushing all over for shame, he
awaits this great torture. Behold these barbarians, like so many ravenous dogs, are already with the scourges attacking this innocent Lamb. See how one

1 "Emendatum ergo illum dimittam." Luke 23.16.
2 "Tunc ergo apprehendit Pilatus Jesum, et flagellavit." John 19.1.

[306] beats him on the breast, another strikes his shoulders, another smites his loins and his legs; even his sacred head and beautiful countenance cannot escape the blows. Ah me! already flows that divine blood from every part; already with that blood are saturated the scourges, the hands of the executioners, the column and the ground. "He is wounded," mourns St. Laurence Justinian, "over his whole body, torn with the scourges; now they twine round his shoulders, now round his legs streaks upon streaks, wounds added to fresh wounds."1

Ah, cruel men, with whom are you dealing thus? Stop, stop; know that you are making a mistake. This man whom you are torturing is innocent and holy; it is we who are the culprits; to us, to us, who have sinned, are these stripes and torments due. O eternal Father! how can You behold Your beloved Son suffering thus, and not interfere in his behalf? What is the crime that he has ever committed, to deserve so shameful and so severe a punishment? *For the wickedness of My people have I struck Him*.2 I well know, says the eternal Father, that this My Son is innocent; but inasmuch as he has offered himself as a satisfaction to My justice for all the sins of mankind, it is fitting that I should abandon him to the rage of his most cruel enemies.

You barbarians, are you not yet satisfied? No; they are not yet satisfied. After having thus scourged him, these executioners wish to treat him as a mock king. What do they do? They make him sit upon a stone, put upon his shoulders a scarlet cloak in imitation of the purple, and into his hand a reed for a sceptre, and upon his head for a crown a bundle of thorns which covers it entirely from the forehead to the neck. And in

1 "Caeditur, totoque flagris corpore dissipatur ; nunc scapulas, nunc crura cingunt ; vulnera vulneribus et plagas plagis recentibus addunt." *De Tr. Chr. Ag*., ch. 2.
2 "Propter scelus populi mei percussi eum." Matt. 27.30.

[307] order that the thorns might sufficiently enter the head, they took a reed and beat with all their might the cruel crown into the head of Jesus: *They took the reed and struck His head*.1

It is not yet enough: bending the knee before him, they mocked him, saying: We salute you, O king of the Jews! Then rising, they laugh at him, mock him, and strike him: *And bowing the knee before Him, they derided Him, saying, Hail King of the Jews*;2 *and they struck Him*.3

Approach, devout souls, and acknowledge him as your Savior, while his enemies

are maltreating and mocking him. Yes, he is a king; but at this moment he is the king of sorrows: he is, however, a king of love, since for the love of you he suffers all these pains.

After having thus scourged him and crowned him with thorns, they seized him as he was, all covered with wounds and blood, and led him to Pilate. The latter, seeing him reduced to a state so worthy of compassion, thought it would be sufficient, in order to pacify the Jews, to show him to them in such a state. *Pilate went forth again to them, . . . and said to them, Behold the man*;4 as though he would have said: Behold the man whom you feared wished to make himself your king; see him reduced to such a state that he cannot live any longer. Let him go and die in his own house; he has but a short time to live; see him reduced to such a state that he has scarcely the appearance of a man. Permit him,

1 "Acceperunt arundinem, et percutiebant caput ejus." Matt. 27.30.
2 "Et genu flexo ante eum, illudebant ei, dicentes : Ave Rex Judaeorum!" Matt. 27.29.
3 "Et dabant ei alapas." John 19.3.
4 "Exivit ergo iterum Pilatus foras, . . . et dicit eis : Ecce Homo." Jn 19.4-5.

[308] therefore, to be set at liberty, your anger against him being sufficiently appeased. If, notwithstanding, you ask that I should condemn him to death, I declare to you that I cannot do so, because I find no reason to condemn him: *I find no fault in Him*.1

As Pilate from the balcony showed Jesus to the people, so at the time the same eternal Father from heaven showed us his well-beloved Son, by saying, Behold the man: Behold this man, who is my only begotten Son, whom I love with the same love with which I love myself! *This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased*.2 Behold the Man, your Savior, him whom I have promised, and for whom you were anxiously waiting. He has become a man of sorrows. Behold him, and see to what a pitiable condition he has reduced himself through the love that he has borne towards you. Oh, look at him, and love him! and if his divine qualities move you not, at least let these sorrows and outrages which he suffers for you move you to love him.

But did the words of Pilate satisfy the cruelty of the enemies of Jesus Christ? On the contrary, the chief priests raised their voices, and cried out: *Away with Him! away with Him! crucify Him!*3 Pilate, however, still resisted, and refused to condemn Jesus. Then they threatened to accuse him as an enemy of Caesar if he refused to pronounce sentence: *If you let this Man go, you are no friend of Caesar's*.4 They thus succeeded in obtaining the desired condemnation; but before

pronouncing it, Pilate washed his hands, declaring himself innocent. *I am innocent of*

1 "Ego enim non invenio in eo causam." John 19.6.
2 "Hic est Filius meus dilectus, in quo mihi bene complacui." Matt. 17.5.
3 "Tolle, tolle ; crucifige eum." John 19.6.
4 "Si hunc dimittis, non es amicus Caesaris." Ibid. 12.

[309] *the blood of this just Man; see to it yourselves*.1 O injustice unheard of in this world: the judge declares the accused to be innocent, and at the same time he condemns him to death!

Unhappy Jews, you then said: *His blood be upon us, and upon our children*.2 You have prayed for the chastisement; it has already come; your children bear to the end of the world the punishment due to the shedding of that innocent blood.

The unjust sentence is read: Jesus accepts it in expiation of our sins: *He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*.3

After the publication of the sentence Jesus is again clothed in his garments that he might be recognized, disfigured as he is by such bad treatment. The cross is presented to him; Jesus embraces it, it is placed upon his shoulders, and he begins to walk towards Calvary: *And bearing His own cross, He went forth to that place which is called Calvary*.4 The condemned criminals now come forth from Pilate's residence, and in the midst of them there goes also our condemned Lord, carrying him self the wood upon which he is to die. O heavens! this
Messias, whoa few days before, on Palm Sunday, was received with the acclamations and benedictions of the people: *Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!*5 See him now in the same streets, bound, execrated by all, moving along to die the death of a criminal. What a spectacle to see a God led to execution! The appearance

1 "Innocens ego sum a sanguine justi hujus ; vos videritis." Matt. 27.24.
2 "Sanguis ejus super nos et super filios nostros."
3 "Humiliavit semetipsum, factus obediens usque ad mortem, mortem autem crucis." John 19.15.
4 "Et bajulans sibi crucem, exivit in eum, qui dicitur Calvarias, locum." Matt. 21.9.
5 "Benedictus, qui venit in nomine Domini!" John 19.17.

[310] of Jesus in this journey was so pitiable that it made all those shed tears that saw him: *And there followed Him a great multitude of people, and of women who bewailed and lamented Him*.1 Ah! look at him also, you who love Jesus Christ; see his torn flesh, his dripping blood, the crown of thorns upon his head, the heavy cross upon his shoulders; and while one of the executioners drags him violently

along by a rope, see how painful is his walk, see his body bent double, his trembling knees, so that it seems as if he would expire at every step.

O divine Lamb! have You not yet Your fill of sufferings? How dear did it cost You to make me comprehend the love which You have for me! Oh, grant me those aids to love You which You have merited for me by so many sufferings! Bestow upon me that sacred fire which You did come to enkindle upon earth by dying for us. Be ever reminding me of Your death that I may never forget to love You.

Isaiah predicted that our Lord would carry the cross upon his shoulders as a mark of his reign: U*pon His shoulder dominion rests*.2 The cross, says Tertullian, was precisely the noble instrument whereby Jesus Christ made acquisition of so many souls; since by dying thereon he paid the penalty due to our sins, and thus rescued us from hell, and made us his own: *Who Himself bore our sins in His body upon the cross*.3

Thus, O my Jesus! if the eternal Father burdened You with all the sins of men, *The Lord laid upon Him the iniquities of us all*.4 I with my own sins added to the weight of the cross that You did bear to Calvary.

1 "Sequebatur autem ilium multa turba populi et mulierum, quae plangebant et lamentabantur eum." Luke 23.27.
2 "Factus est principatus super humerum ejus." Is. 9.6.
3 Qui peccata nostra ipse pertulit in corpore suo super lignum." 1 Pet. 2.24.
4 "Posuit Dominus in eo iniquitatem omnium nostrum." Is. 53.6.

[311] My sweetest Savior, You did even then foresee all the wrongs that I should do to You; yet, notwithstanding, You did not cease to love me, or to prepare for me all the merits that You have since employed towards me. If then to You I have been dear, most vile and ungrateful sinner as I am, who have so much offended You, good reason is there why You should be dear to me. Ah, would that I had never displeased You! Now, my Jesus, do I know the wrong that I have done You. O you accursed sins of mine, what have you done? You have caused me to sadden the loving heart of my Redeemer, that heart which has loved me so much. O my Jesus! forgive me, repenting, as I do, of having done evil to You. Henceforth it is You who are to be the only object of my love. I love You, O infinite loveliness, with all my heart; and I resolve to love none else but You. O Lord, pardon me! I say to You with St. Ignatius: "Give me only Your love together with Your grace, and I am rich enough."1

Third Scene: Calvary

Here we are at the third and last scene of the tortures that of Calvary, which brought death to Jesus Christ. They immediately tear off his garments, sticking to his wounded flesh, and throw him down upon the cross. The divine Lamb reaches forth to the executioners his hands and his feet to be nailed, and offers up to his eternal Father the great sacrifice of his life for the salvation of men. After the nailing of one of his hands, the nerves shrink so that they had need of main force and ropes to draw the other hand and feet up to the places where they were to be nailed; and this occasioned so great a tension of the nerves and veins, that they broke asunder with a violent convulsion, as

1 "Amorem tui solum cum gratia tua mihi dones, et dives sum satis."

[312] was revealed to St. Bridget: "They drew my hands and feet with a rope to the places of the nails, so that the nerves and veins were stretched out to the full and broke asunder;"1 insomuch that all his bones might have been numbered, as David had already predicted: *They pierced My hands and My feet, they numbered all My bones*.2

St. Augustine says that there is no death more bitter than that of the cross. "Among all the different kinds of death, there was none worse."3 Because, as St. Thomas observes,4 those who are crucified have their hands and their feet pierced through, parts which being entirely composed of nerves, muscles, and veins, are the most sensitive to pain, and the very weight of the body itself, which is suspended from them, causes the pain to be continuous and ever increasing in its intensity up to the moment of death.

But the pains of Jesus were far beyond all other pains; for, as the Angelic Doctor says, the body of Jesus Christ, being perfectly constituted, was more quick and sensitive to pain that body which was fashioned for him by the Holy Spirit, expressly with a view to his suffering, as he had foretold, as the Apostle testifies: *A body You have prepared for Me*." Moreover, St. Thomas says that Jesus Christ took upon himself an amount of suffering so great as to be sufficient to satisfy for the temporal punishment merited by the sins of all mankind.

My soul, behold your Lord, behold your life hanging upon that tree: *And your life shall be, as it were, hanging*

1 "Manus et pedes cum tunc trahebant ad loca clavorum, ita ut nervi et venae extenderentur et rumperentur." *Rev.* Bk. 1, ch. 10.
2 "Foderunt manus meas et pedes meos, dinumeraverunt omnia ossa mea." Ps. 21.17.
3 "Pejus nihil fuit inter omnia genera mortium." *In Jo.*, tr. 36.
4 *S. Theol*. III. q. 46. a. 6.

5 "Corpus autem aptasti mihi." Heb. 10.5.

[313] *before you*.1 Behold how on that cross of pain, fastened by those cruel nails, he finds no place of rest. Now he leans his weight upon his hands, now upon his feet; but on what part soever he leans, the anguish increases. He turns his afflicted head now on one side, now on the other; if he lets it fall towards his breast, the hands, by the additional weight, are rent the more; if he lowers it towards his shoulders, the shoulders are pierced with thorns; if he leans it back upon the cross, the thorns enter the more deeply into his head.

Ah, my Jesus, what a death of bitterness is this that You are enduring! O my crucified Redeemer, I adore You on this throne of disgrace and pain. Upon this cross I read it written that You are a King: *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.*2 But apart from this title of scorn, what is the evidence that You give of being a king? Ah, these hands transfixed with nails, this head pierced with thorns, this throne of sorrow, this lacerated flesh, make me well know that You are a king, but a king of love. With humility, then, and tenderness do I draw near to kiss Your sacred feet, transfixed for love of me. I clasp in my arms this cross, on which You, being made a victim of love, were willing to offer Yourself in sacrifice for me to the divine justice: *being made obedient unto death, the death of the cross*.3 O blessed obedience, that obtained for us the pardon of our sins! And what would have become of me, O my Savior, had You not paid the penalty for me?

Contemplating one day the love of Jesus in dying for us, St. Francis of Paula, rapt in ecstasy and raised in the air, exclaimed three times in a loud voice: "O God, love! O God, love! O God, love!" You

1 "Et erit vita tua quasi pendens ante te." Deut. 28.66.
2 "Jesu Nazarenus, Rex Judaeorum." John 19.19.
3 "Factus obediens usque ad mortem, mortem autem crucis." Phil. 2.8.

[314] also, devout souls, look on your divine Savior on this painful cross; see how he remains fastened by those three nails, so that the pierced hands and feet had to sustain the weight of the entire body; on whichever side he wishes to rest his pains are increased. Alas! our afflicted Savior finds no place of rest.

Behold the King of heaven, who, hanging on that gibbet, is now on the point of giving up the ghost. Let us, too, ask of him with the prophet: *What are those wounds in the middle of Your hands?* Tell me, O my Jesus, what are these wounds in the middle of Your hands?1 The Abbot Rupert makes answer for Jesus: "They are the memorials of love, the price of redemption."2 They are tokens, says the

Redeemer, of the great love which I bear toward you; they are the payment by which I set you free from the hands of your enemies, and from eternal death.

Do you, then, O faithful souls, love your God, who has had such love for you; and if you do at any time feel doubtful of his love, turn your eyes, says St. Thomas of Villanova, to behold that cross, those pains, and that bitter death which he has suffered for you; for such proofs will assuredly make you know how much your Savior loves you: "The cross testifies, the pains testify, the bitter death that he had endured for you testifies this."3 And St. Bernard adds that the cross cries out, every wound of Jesus cries out, that he loves us with a true love: "The cross proclaims, the wounds proclaim, that he truly loves."4

While hanging on the cross Jesus looked in vain for someone to console him: *I looked for one that would grieve*

1 "Quid sunt plagae istae in medio manuum tuarum?"
2 "Sunt monumenta charitatis, pretia redemptionis."
3 "Testis crux, testes dolores, testis amara mors, quam pro te sustinuit." *17th Sun. after Pent., conc.* 3.
4 "Clamat crux, clamat vulnus, quod ipse vere dilexit."

[315] *together with me, but there was none.*1 On the contrary, he heard those around him uttering blasphemies: *If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross*.2 *You who will destroy the temple of God, and in three days rebuild it, save yourself*.3 *He saved others, himself he cannot save*.4 Why should they care to afflict by insults and derision one that is already expiring on the cross?

And Jesus, while these are outraging him, what is he doing upon the cross? Is he perhaps praying to the eternal Father to punish them? No, he is praying to him to pardon them: *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*.5 Yes, says St. Thomas; to show forth the immense love which he had for men, the Redeemer asked pardon of God for his crucifiers: "To show forth the abundance of his love, he asked pardon for his persecutors."6 He asked it, and obtained it; for, when they had seen him die they repented of their sin: *They returned beating their breasts*.7

Ah, my dear Savior, behold me at Your feet; I have been one of the most ungrateful of Your persecutors; pray likewise for me to Your Father to pardon me. True it is that the Jews and the executioners knew not what they were doing when they crucified You; but I well knew that in sinning I was offending a God who had been crucified, and had died for me. But Your blood and Your death have merited even for

1 "Et sustinui . . . qui consolaretur, et non inveni." Ps. 68.21.

2 "Si Filius Dei es, descende de cruce."
3 "Vale, qui destruis templum Dei, et in triduo reaedificas; salva temetipsum."
4 "Alios salvos fecit, seipsum non potest salvum facere." Matt. 27.40-42.
5 "Pater! dimitte illis; non enim sciunt quid faciunt." Luke 23.34.
6 "Ad ostendendam charitatis suae, veniam pro persecutoribus postulavit." *S. Theol.* III. q. 47. a. 4.
7 "Percutientes pectora sua, revertebantur." Luke 23.48.

[316] me the divine mercy. I cannot feel doubtful of being pardoned after seeing You die to obtain pardon for me.

The sorrowful Mother stood at the foot of the cross with some pious women: *There stood by the cross of Jesus His mother*.1 O God! who would not pity a mother standing beside the cross on which a son dies before her eyes? Consider Mary, standing beneath the cross, contemplating the pains in the midst of which her well-beloved Son was expiring: She desired to give him some alleviation, and she saw, on the other hand, that her presence increased the grief of this same Son, who was full of compassion for his tender Mother. This was a terrible affliction for Mary, a torture that made her the Queen of Martyrs.

Seeing himself, then, abandoned by every one, all men trying to make his death more painful, Jesus raised his eyes to his eternal Father to obtain some consolation. But seeing him laden with all our sins, for which he wished to satisfy the divine justice, his Father also abandoned him. Then it was that our Savior, crying out with a loud voice, said: *My God, My God, why have*
*You forsaken Me?*2

But our Savior, so full of love, is on the point of expiring. Christians, look at the cross. Behold those dying eyes, that face so pale, the sacred body which is abandoned to death. Before expiring, Jesus uttered these words: *It is finished.*3 It is as if he had said: O men, love me; I have done all that I can do in order to save your souls and gain your love. See the painful life that I have led during thirty-three years for love of you. I wished then on your account to be scourged, to

1 "Stabant autem juxta crucem Jesu Mater ejus. . . ." John 19.25.
2 "Deus meus! Deus meus! ut quid dereliquisti me?" Matt.. 27.46.
3 "Consummatum est." John 19.30.

[317] be crowned with thorns, to be struck, to be covered with wounds from head to foot. What more was needed? Should I die for love of you? Well, then! I wish to die. Come, O death! I permit you to come; take away my life, in order that my sheep may live. *And Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit*.1 My Father, he then said, I die for Your glory and for the salvation of men; I commend my soul into Your hands. Behold, then, Jesus dies. O

angels of heaven, come, come to be present at the death of your God. And you, O sorrowful Mother! approach nearer to the cross; look at him more steadfastly, for he is about to expire.

And you Christians, behold him in his agony; see him amid the last respirations of life. Behold his dying eyes, that face so pale, that feebly palpitating heart, that body already wrapped in the arms of death, and that beautiful soul now on the point of leaving that wounded body.

The sky shrouds itself in darkness; the earth quakes; the graves open. Alas, what portentous signs are these! They are signs that the Maker of the world is now dying.

Behold, in the last place, how our Lord, after having commended his blessed soul to his eternal Father, first breathing forth from his afflicted heart a deep sigh, and then bowing down his head in token of his obedience, and offering up his death for the salvation of men, at last through the violence of the pain expires, and delivers up his spirit into the hands of his beloved Father: *And crying out with a loud voice, He said 'Father into Your hands I commend My spirit'*;1 *and saying this He gave up his spirit*.2

1 "Et clamans voce magna, Jesus ait : Pater! in manus tuas commendo spiritum meum." Luke 23.46.
2 "Et haec dicens, exspiravit." Ibid.

[318] All those that were present looking at him with attention see him expire, and observing that he is motionless, they exclaim, 'He is dead he is dead!' Mary hears this from all the bystanders, and she also says, 'Ah, my Son, You are dead!' He is dead! Ah, who is dead? It is the King of heaven; the Creator of the world, a God, who wished to die for us poor sinners.

Act of Contrition while showing the Crucifix

Come sinners; here is Jesus Christ who has stretched forth his arms to embrace you. Can you fear that he will not pardon you, when he gave himself up to death in order to pardon you?

Do you perhaps fear that you will not obtain pardon because you find yourselves unable to perform the penance that your sins deserve? Console yourselves; for you here see the penance that Jesus Christ has himself performed for you on the cross; it is sufficient if you sincerely repent of having offended him.

Look at him; see where you can find any one that has loved you more than Jesus

Christ has loved you. Love him then, since he died in order to be loved by you. Say to him: Ah, my sweet Savior! whom should I love if I do not love a God who has died for me?

O sorrowful Mother! through the sorrow that you did experience in seeing your divine Son expire, obtain for me holy perseverance and a true love of my divine Redeemer.

Prayer

My Jesus, by the pain You did endure when
Your left hand was pierced with the nail,
give me a true sorrow for my sins.
My Jesus, by the pain You did endure when
Your right hand was pierced with the nail,
give me perseverance in Your grace.
My Jesus, by the pain You did endure when
Your left foot was pierced with the nail,
deliver me from the pains of hell.
My Jesus, by the pain You did endure when
Your right foot was pierced with the nail,
give me the grace to love You eternally in heaven.
My Jesus, by the wound that was made in
Your Sacred Heart, give me the grace to love You always
in this life and in the next.
Have mercy on us, Jesus, our Love.
Pray for us, Mary, our Hope.